CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

Interview with **KWAME HOLMAN**
Interviewed by Gladys Mack

Kwame Holman was Marion Barry's driver during much of the 1978 campaign, accompanying him to campaign events in every part of the District. He was Deputy Press Secretary in the Mayor's Office in the first Barry administration. Later, he went to Northwestern University for a graduate degree in journalism. He was Political and Congressional Correspondent for The NewsHour on the Public Broadcasting System for 31 years.

15 October 2015

INTERVIEWER: My name is Gladys Mack, and today is October 15, 2015. I am interviewing Kwame Holman for the Marion Barry Oral History Project.

KWAME HOLMAN: Hi, Gladys.

INTERVIEWER: Hi. Let's talk a little bit about you, talk about where you were born, how you got to D.C., and what brought you here.

KWAME HOLMAN: Well, as I'm always proud to say that I was born in New Haven, because it makes people think, "Oh, you probably went to Yale." I spent the first 6 months of my life in New Haven, Connecticut, and that was the first and last time I was there, really. My father, M. Carl Holman, was attending Yale in Yale's drama school, and I would find out later that it was a class, a group—now, I don't know if they were that at the same time, exactly the same time, but I think they were, that Paul Newman was there, and some other names that don't come to me at the moment.

They and their two children lived there, and then I came along, and then the drama school program ended and it was off to Atlanta, Georgia, and those are my first memories.

INTERVIEWER: The family picked up and moved to Atlanta.

KWAME HOLMAN: Moved to Atlanta.

INTERVIEWER: And had your father finished studied them, or what did he do there?

KWAME HOLMAN: He was always a writer and a thinker and a philosopher, and I think his plan was to write plays, in fact, and he would, over the succeeding decades, take some time to try to work on a couple or three plays, and we've still got the notes somewhere. But like so many other African Americans, he was drawn by the Civil Rights Movement and it took him off of that course. He maintained the writing interest by starting the *Atlanta Enquirer*—not starting it. He

became the editor-in-chief shortly after it was started, and this was the sort of vanguard civil rights organ of the South, of certainly the Atlanta region, a place where Julian Bond [prominent civil rights leader and politician] and Charlene Hunter, later Charlene Hunter-Gault [journalist and foreign correspondent for National Public Radio, and the Public Broadcasting Service]..would work with him in our house on getting out the newspaper. And Charlene was giving an interview just the other day and she was talking about that time in an interview just the other day, and she was saying that they would go to demonstrations and sort of participate in the demonstrations, and then rush back to our house and write about the experience, and that sort of thing.

I attended, with my brother and sister, the segregated parochial school, the Catholic school for African American children whose parents had the wherewithal, not in the terms we think of today, but just a little more money.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. Well, the Catholic schools were always a little bit more, but sort of middle-class families could afford it.

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely. And so there we were, coming from our black neighborhood to getting driven by the neighbor or by Mom or Dad to our all-black, Our Lady of Lourdes elementary school. A wonderful experience for me, with the nuns. A little fearful, that kind of thing, but I learned to read and write and think and so forth, and I had a great time.

My brother and sister who were both older would have more feel for Atlanta, because we pulled up roots again, when I was 11, like the fifth grade, and landed here in Washington. Again, the Civil Rights Movement having brought my father to Washington, this time to become the Staff Director of the brand new U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, where he would encounter the Roger Wilkinses and the Vernon Jordans [both eminent civil rights leaders], and where he would go on to be this mentor and voice for the Civil Rights Movement. I mean, he had talked to [Martin Luther] King and worked with King in Atlanta, and so he would go on to talk with Jesse [Jackson, a close associate of King] and work with Jesse and the rest in Washington, and Richard Hatcher [first African-American mayor of a US city larger than 100,000 population when elected Mayor of Gary, Indiana], the whole group, and later Marion Barry.

INTERVIEWER: We're going to get to that in a minute. Was your mom a stay-at-home mom, or was she also employed?

KWAME HOLMAN: Yes, and I'm glad you said that because I'm sitting here talking about my father and his being the impetus, his work being the impetus for our moving. None of that would have been possible, no success at doing any of that would have been possible without Mariella Holman, who ran everything, and kept the house going, and kept us going, and kept him going, and kept the Julians and the Charlenes and the Jim Gibsons [Deputy Mayor for Planning in Mayor Barry's first administration] who would come and work on the paper, kept them going, and was just the spirit and life and vibrancy of the family and everybody she came in contact with.

She also worked, of course. Having come from Philadelphia and taken an interest, I don't recall where, in the French language, but she would come to Atlanta, go to Spelman [College], meet Carl Holman there, I think, and then they would become married. So during the time in Atlanta she had this interest in French. She had studied French and so she became a French teacher at the Booker T. Washington segregated public high school in Atlanta, where she taught French.

So when we arrived in Washington, she did the same thing at the largely segregated, though more since we were up north it was the de facto segregation of up here, at Hart Junior High School in Congress Heights in Far Southeast, and she loved the work there at Hart Junior High School, teaching French. The story always was that in all of the succeeding years and decades, you could be anywhere out in the street with Mom and walk by somebody and the person would stop and turn, "Ms. Holman"—and you know that experience, and all her students, far and wide.

INTERVIEWER: So you're established here in Washington, you go to high school. Did you go on to college?

KWAME HOLMAN: Right. All public schools in D.C.—Amidon Elementary, Jefferson Junior High School, and Western Senior High School that would become the Duke Ellington—that now is the great Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and I always say that I like to think that our activism in the late '60s, early '70s, helped to create the environment and push the school board to do things like have an arts school, and establish things that particularly helped low-income students and students who needed help.

Many people went on to some of the private schools, colleges around. I knew I didn't have any particular interest in going to a big private school anywhere else. I was happy to think of myself as going to Howard University. I wanted to go to Howard. I wanted to—like my father, I was interested in writing and so I wanted to go and study black history and black writers. I did that and enjoyed it a lot.

So then toward the end, I would say to my father, toward the end of my academic career, if you will, at Howard, I sort of reached the point where, well, it's sort of time to graduate but I don't have all the credits yet, but what am I going to do? What do I really want to do? And I had an interest in science and my father said, "Well, you could be a dentist by day and a writer by night, because it's hard to make a living as a writer," as he knew and as we all know, unless you're [Earnest] Hemingway [prominent 20th century writer and novelist] or Richard Wright [important African-American writer].

INTERVIEWER: Ta-Nehisi Coates [bestselling 21st century African-American writer].

KWAME HOLMAN: Because of the groundwork that has been laid, of course, he's so brilliant. He would be a success in any era.

INTERVIEWER: Well, actually, I went to his lecture last night, which was so enlightening, but I mentioned him because he called Howard [University] "the Mecca," and you sort of echoed that same thing.

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely. It was, and I think that was another reason I wanted to go there, because Howard has that great tradition. So I read the writers, Jean Toomer and Claude McKay [writers of the Harlem Renaissance, the flowering of African-American arts and letters in the 1920s], and I felt that they were sort of there, and Alain Locke ["Dean" of the Harlem Renaissance], and I could sort of feel them around in the buildings. It was marvelous.

So it was time to graduate and I had to get practical, so I said, well, I did study science, and so with my friends and contacts I could have talked and limped my way into Howard's dental school, maybe, with my terrible GPA. But it occurred to me that I finally had grown up enough to recognize that you can't talk about spending 3 years doing something you're not really interested in.

So I was just sort of drifting about, and one day I was drifting about downtown, headed to, Gladys, the Soul Shack and Record City, the record stores downtown on G Street. And I come out of, I think, Record City, and was heading down to the Soul Shack, to spend some of my meager cash on some 45s and whatever was hot, and I rounded the corner and I saw, in that—what was the name of that piano store, that music store that was right there on the corner of 13th and G? But the next storefront—Jordan Music, exactly—the next storefront belonged to a campaign, and as I rounded the corner and started down the street, a figure came out of the storefront, and I don't know if I could see Betty King [fund-raiser on Barry's 1978 campaign] through the window back there, sitting in her familiar place at that desk right by the front, but this was Sybil Hammond [scheduler on Barry's 1978 campaign] standing on the sidewalk, old friend.

"Hey, Sybil, how you doing?" And she looked at me as if to say, "Great. There you are. I've been looking for you." She said, "Kwame, I need somebody to drive Marion. I need somebody to drive the campaign car and you're it, basically. What are you doing?" I said, "Well, not much, Sybil." She said, "All right. Well, you're doing this," and off we went. And so I would get to know Marion well. We never spent a lot of time in the car as we went from event to event. Usually there was at least one other person in the campaign car, the big Ford. We were driving a big green Ford. But he was such a gentle soul and spirit, and such a genial and kind person that it was always easy to be around him.

INTERVIEWER: What did you know of him before that time?

KWAME HOLMAN: I knew that he was this insurgent candidate. I really had no thought of getting into the political scene or getting directly involved in a campaign, but I knew that he was the candidate who was most aligned with the kinds of things I believed in, the kinds of moving ahead the Civil Rights Movement, of moving ahead an opportunity for black people, particularly

poor black people, to break into and share the prosperity of the society. And so I viewed, with some interest, what he was doing. I never thought I'd end up in the car with him.

INTERVIEWER: Right. So you had not been aware of Pride [Inc., a youth training and employment program run by Barry], that organization, or the transit bus boycott [lead by Barry]?

KWAME HOLMAN: No. Only in doing what everybody does—reading the *Washington Post* and the candidate profile. I had never been down to City Hall and that sort of thing. But I did keep up and I didn't know a lot of people who were involved, other than Sybil and her husband, Hampton [Cross], who were both involved. But I knew what the average person in D.C. knew about Marion—well regarded, well respected, trying to move the city and its people forward.

INTERVIEWER: Interesting. So in the campaign, what else did you do besides chauffeur him around? Did you have other duties, and as you got to know him, what did you think of his personality? You must have gotten to know him pretty well.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yeah, I think I did. I think I came to know him well, and I think we developed a relationship, a friendship, a camaraderie that I think probably is born in any situation in which it's just the two of you, late at night, at the end of a long day, and taking him back to his house on Capitol Hill, or he's dropping me off and turning the car over to him as he would go on to be into the night. You know, the stereotype of Marion Barry was that he's doing terrible things, but you know this, Gladys. He would go on into the night meeting, doing meetings, doing organizing, visiting with Ivanhoe [Donaldson, Barry's campaign manager in 1978], working on his campaign. And sure, he might end up at the late-night restaurant or bar, but he was doing the work.

INTERVIEWER: He was working.

KWAME HOLMAN: Always working. No doubt about it. Hardest working person I had ever encountered.

And so my role, really, was an observer. I mean, I wasn't a political strategist. I wasn't involved in trying to figure out the next things to do. I was happy to observe this operation, and coming back to the campaign headquarters, and seeing a Betty King seeming like she's working like four phones at a time, and 3x5 cards everywhere, and Sybil working the schedule, and Ivanhoe pacing back and forth and smoking cigarettes and figuring out how to make things work.

What I remember observing most, what stands out to me most about the many events we would go to—it's event after event, backyard barbecue, not many candidate forums—

INTERVIEWER: Campaign activities.

KWAME HOLMAN: —campaign activities, somebody's living room, somebody's fundraisers, that kind of thing. But I remember the backyard barbecues and the block parties in the lowest-income parts of the city, where we'd pull up and people would recognize that somebody they really either already know and trust or want to know more about had just arrived. And people would come up, and he was just getting to be known city-wide, but he had that reputation, and I think what I was observing was the beginning of the bond that he was making with everybody in the city, but particularly with low-income people in the city. And he knew to come to where they were, and he knew to be with them and let them see and touch and feel him, and to sit in the kitchen, and to sit at the picnic table, and spend time. And he would do it.

We didn't have cell phones but sometimes we got the word that we've got to keep moving, got to keep moving, and Marion wouldn't move. He liked staying and talking and listening to people. And they would say, "Mr. Barry, I need a job. I've got to have a job." "All right. What's your name? All right. I'm going to work on that. So, now, did you talk to—," and he knew that community leaders. He knew the people who maybe could get you a job. Have you talked to so-and-so? And it was a remarkable thing to watch.

INTERVIEWER: It's interesting that you make that point because he'd go back to his office, or wherever he was, and he'd call up the person that he thought could be helpful to whoever he had talked to. So over the years I heard a lot of those people talk about those Monday morning calls from the mayor, trying to help out.

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely. And that great mind like a steel trap. He would remember. You're making me think of the fact that not only did he seem to know every political operative ward heeler, community leader, everywhere, he knew the people who could help and he remembered to do the things of making the calls, and keeping his word about helping someone he looked in the eye and told he was going to help.

INTERVIEWER: Did you see, in those early days, any parallels between him and your father, moving around in the Civil Rights Movement, and sort of the goals that each of them had?

KWAME HOLMAN: Yeah, that's an interesting question, Gladys. It's not one I've really thought about, but my father was the same way, on the particular thing of trying to help an individual. My father would work the phones just the way Marion would, to try to solve a problem, get somebody out of trouble, get someone a job, get something to happen for somebody, whether it's a young person needing a job, a businessperson needing a contact, whatever. Both men had the commitment to service, to public service, service to black people, and they were both dedicated about it. So, yeah, there's a parallel there.

INTERVIEWER: As the campaign went on, what did you think about it? Did you think Marion's going to win, or did you think this is a hopeless effort? What did you observe?

KWAME HOLMAN: Yeah, that's a good question too, because I think those of us early on, and everybody who observed the campaign felt somewhere between those two things—this is a

hopeless, symbolic, nice try kind of thing or we're going to win. And along the way we would encounter people, political operatives all around town—and come to think of it, I think Betty King might have been the first person early in those days who said "we are going to win this thing," and I think she still talks about that fact.

INTERVIEWER: Florence [Tate, Barry's campaign press secretary in 1978] and her.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yeah, both Betty and Florence. But the rest of us were so-called realists, and I think that I thought he's probably not going to win but, boy, this is a good thing for the city, it's a good thing for people. I'm having a ball watching this and observing it and being part of it, and it's just great. But at the same time, as it went on, as you say, you could tell something was happening. You could tell something was happening and it didn't have to do with what the polls said or whatever. You could see it in the reactions of people of all kinds across the city.

INTERVIEWER: That brings me to my next question, and that is, what was the racial climate at that time, and how did Marion go over in the basically white Ward 3, which was very highly concentrated with whites?

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely. Absolutely. You know, when I think of the color line in D.C., you know, having spent time in Atlanta, even though I was a very young child, but I knew something of the South but I didn't encounter Jim Crow down there because my world was completely segregated as a child. In fact, it wasn't until I got to Washington that I was called "nigger" in the lobby of the Uptown movie theater by a child not much older than I. And I can remember just being completely shocked and taken aback. I was like, wow, that was weird. Did he really say that? Where did that come from? And by that time he had gone so I didn't have a chance to react any more than that.

We lived in Southwest D.C., which was an up-and-coming place, but I was going to try to say something about the sort of cookie cutter housing that a friend of mine, years later, would call Soviet-style housing. You know, just condominium after condominium after high rise after high rise. But this was what came after the bulldozing of—and you probably know this—the old Southwest, with its low-income people—

INTERVIEWER: It's called urban renewal.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yes—low-income people, night life, brothers, very poor, from what I know of it. It was bulldozed and these condos were put up, and these apartment buildings and townhouses were put up, and that's where we lived. It was completely integrated, and, in fact, Capitol Park, where I had my childhood and young adulthood, it was sort of like Columbia [Maryland]. You know, it was sort of like an arranged neighborhood. And lots of African Americans of the new professional class in government with Lyndon Johnson and so forth, moved there—Roger Wilkins and Edward Sylvester and such people. And among them were fairly high-ranking European-American families and fathers and their families.

So my feeling about the color line in D.C. was that it was as mild as you're probably going to find anywhere. It wasn't Chicago. It wasn't Boston. It wasn't even Philly. Washington had kind of a mellow racial tension to the extent that it was there, and, of course, it always is. Now, going to Ward 3—because we're all segregated in terms of our housing and so Ward 3 was, and is, largely the white side of town—so many progressive whites—you know, I wasn't surprised by it but Marion would walk into a fundraiser in Ward 3 and light up in the room in the same way he would in any other ward. And again, this was what made you feel and understand that there was really something special about him, about the times, generally, and about that moment for this city.

INTERVIEWER: That's a good point, and I would just add that, in a way, he was far more progressive than the middle-class and kind of the upper-middle-class African Americans in the city, because Washington D.C. had sort of an upper-middle-class kind of cult-like group that didn't look too well to Marion Barry because he was an activist, he wore dashikis—

KWAME HOLMAN: I think "street nigger" was a term that was tossed around a good deal.

INTERVIEWER: It really seemed to fit within that group.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yes, that's right. That's right, Gladys. I hadn't thought about that, but yes, that was there. I guess it didn't come immediately to mind because it was because of that dynamic, because that group, if you will, the establishment African American community of Upper Northwest, of 16th Street, the Gold Coast, the Platinum Coast—what's that estate's name? North Portal Estates. These were not Marion's people. These were [City Council Chairman] Sterling Tucker's people or [Incumbent Mayor] Walter Washington's people. [Tucker and Washington were also running for Mayor in 1978]. And so, therefore, the campaign car didn't arrive up there very much, because, according to Ivanhoe Donaldson's brilliant strategy, we're going to take lower-income African Americans across the city, we're going to put that together—and I'm sure everybody's talked about this in all the interviews—put that together with progressive whites in Ward 3, with gays in the center of the city in Ward 1, build this coalition that did not include necessarily those African Americans. So that was the dynamic in the campaign and it was known.

But you mentioned the insider/outsider thing, and what fascinated me later on, Gladys, was to realize that—and people would start to write about this, Tom Sherwood [reporter for the *Washington Post* and later NBC channel 4] and others, and people would think about this, and I think Ivanhoe recognized it early on and talked about it—that the African Americans that were here were complacent, to put it bluntly and unkindly—

INTERVIEWER: Good, solid government workers.

KWAME HOLMAN: —good, solid government workers, hard-working, decent, God-fearing, but not going to rock the boat kind of people.

INTERVIEWER: Because they owned homes, they had kids to send to college, and they just wanted to do good.

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely. And that it took—Ivanhoe and others would say it took people from the outside, such as Marion, to come and push. And then, over the succeeding years, after Marion's election and elections, it was wonderful to see everybody just gravitate to him.

INTERVIEWER: So here we are, now. The hard-fought campaign is over. He's won. I like to say it took 2 months, I think, to count the vote because it was so close, between the three high competitors—Sterling Tucker, the chair of the City Council; the sitting mayor, Walter Washington, and the upstart, Marion Barry. So what did you do at that point?

KWAME HOLMAN: Right. I think the first thing I did—

INTERVIEWER: They had government-paid drivers, at that point.

KWAME HOLMAN: I know. They took my job. They took my job. Yeah, and I think at one point Ivanhoe—you know, he finally and went and got down the list of what-are-you-going-to-do-now people, down to me, and he just kind of looked at me, and, "Well, you can't drive." But I think the first thing was—I can remember being in the room at the Harambee House when—that hotel at Howard University, right, right. And, as you say, it was very close and it still wasn't clear. You know, we thought, okay, it's really close, and that should have told us that that means you actually can win. But when it happened, it was just so astounding.

I don't think I'm imagining this. I'm pretty sure I have this right, that I was standing close to Marion and Ivanhoe when a moment occurred between the two of them in which Marion said something like, "We've got it" and Ivanhoe, having heard the same information, acknowledged it. And I just watched both me and they just sort of looked at each other and didn't react in any visible way, but they knew that they had done this thing, this amazing thing.

And so what did I think? Gladys, I think I thought—my first thought wasn't I'm going to work in the city government. I thought, well, that's great, you know, and I was a part of it, and whatever might be next. And so—and I'm really just thinking of this now, I mean, Ivanhoe said, "Well, what do you want to do?" and I said, "Oh, well, he's offering me a job to do something. I guess I'd better think of an answer." And so I said, "Well, I don't know. I mean, I like to write and I was thinking of maybe doing some reporting or whatever."

And I don't know how the next thing happened, but I think Ivanhoe might have said, "Well, Florence"—Florence Tate—"is going to run the press operation, be the press secretary. Why don't you help her out?" And I just said, "Yeah, sure, fine, great," you know, because you can write press releases and you can be involved in the written and spoken word. And, frankly, as it turns out, you can be right up here where all the action is, and watching you and everybody else, these great cabinet meetings, all these illustrious people, and so, yeah, it was great.

INTERVIEWER: That leads me to the question, what did you think of that first cabinet? I was honored to be a part of it, and it, to me, was just a wonderful, wonderful collection of people who were prepared to serve in that manner and had not had the opportunity.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yeah, it was amazing. It was amazing. You remember that room, Gladys. The Mayor's Office is here, the Mayor's anteroom here, the fifth floor hallway here, and then off here is this cabinet room, if you will. Did Mayor Washington use it as a cabinet room as well?

INTERVIEWER: I think so, yeah.

KWAME HOLMAN: So it had been the cabinet room.

This will sound weird but that's okay. I remember being in there and seeing you and Cortland Cox [director, Minority Business Opportunity Commission], and Judith Rogers [Corporation Counsel], and Elijah Rogers [City Administrator], and seeing all these brilliant people arrayed around this, and what I thought was a newly liberated African nation, and here is the president, and here is his cabinet. Because, of course, you know, Marion spoke as a progressive sort of Pan-Africanist thinker and speaker would about Africa, and then, of course, he would go early on, on that trip [to Africa], in that first administration. And I thought, this is not just some city government. This is a special collection of people who are, like, almost way overqualified to be doing something at a municipal level.

INTERVIEWER: And one other significant thing about that was how many women were in the leadership position.

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: And as you know, in the African American community, women have always had important, high-level positions. But when Marion came to selecting his cabinet he certainly didn't forget that. He found the best, most qualified men and women to serve in positions, which also made it different.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yeah. I remember being struck by that, and we would all figure, oh, well, yeah, Marion will have a woman or two doing this, that. Marion was telling people and, you know, chief of staff jobs, and others even below the top tier, if you will, "I want women in here, working." And you came to realize, oh yeah, he sees this as an important thing. Forget about the symbolism that a lot of people were using to have the first black or the first woman. He was, like, "I am going to empower women, qualified women, to do great things."

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely, and we used to joke because he said, "You know, Ms. Mack, I like to hire women because they'll get the job done." He said, "They'll work hard." So I joked and said, "Oh, you have the women in the office working while you guys are out playing."

KWAME HOLMAN: Gladys, that is proof of his brilliance in terms of judging people, understanding situations, and understanding what needed to be done. So one could argue, okay, well, maybe it wasn't that he wanted to address and, to some degree, right the wrongs of gender discrimination. He recognized that women were better at doing what he wanted done. Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: That was a great thing.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: So kind of what are you—well, you haven't talked much about what you did once you left the administration. Talk a little bit about that, because you moved on to a career outside.

KWAME HOLMAN: Right. And, you know, there came a time when Marion shut down the press office because, you know, things weren't going the way—you know, I think if Marion ever had a blind spot, if you will, and I think that it applied to just about everything, he knew the right thing to do, he knew what he wanted to do, and he always wanted to do the right thing. And so he did not have much patience or regard for those who would get in his way and try to impede. And that included the press, to a substantial extent. He thought the role—I shouldn't say he thought the role of the press was to quiescently just go along, to acquiesce to everything—but there was something like that, and not because he was against the press or the First Amendment, but because he was moving forward and didn't think that it was necessary and stop and answer your incessant questions about trivia, is what it amounted to to him.

INTERVIEWER: We used to say, after the cabinet meeting, when the press had everything that had gone on at the cabinet meeting, and we used to get angry because we wanted to know, how does the press know everything that's going on? And we had a joke, well, you know, Marion goes out and tells them.

KWAME HOLMAN: Exactly. That was the other side of it. Of course he was close to Milton Coleman [principal *Washington Post* reporter covering DC in 1978], and he and Milton would talk all the time.

INTERVIEWER: He respected the press and he thought he could get them to see his point of view.

KWAME HOLMAN: That's an excellent point. That is an excellent point and it's great of you. Yeah, some old deputy press secretary that I didn't even remember that part of it, and think to say that. He had a deep understanding of the press, just as he had of everyone else's role.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

KWAME HOLMAN: Yes, he was impatient about, you know, this, that, and the other, but he understood the role and he understood the importance of getting the press to understand and, as you say, to try to get them to come along. He wanted them just like he wanted everybody else following the drum major.

But when there were articles appearing about, speaking of the drivers who did the drivers for Marion, the overtime for the drivers, and the *Evening Star* was pounding away at the overtime costs for the group of drivers, that 24-hour cadre, and, you know, finally Marion was like, "Florence, why can't you just stop them?" and Florence would just roll her eyes, and say, "Marion, you can't stop them."

So finally he just—you know, Florence put up her hands and Marion said, "Look, all right. I'm changing the whole thing." And so, at that point, I said, "Well, look." He closed down the office and said, "You can go work in this other communications office," and I was like, "No, I don't think I want to do that." But, of course, Marion being Marion, he would never throw anybody out on the street, you know. So he said, "Just go take any job, anywhere." So I started working at the Community Service Office, which was also great because there I learned, Gladys, that under Marion, and I'm sure under [Mayor] Walter [Washington], this Community Service Office talked to the people who were most in need in the entire city, and tried to plug them into some kind of help with housing or drug addiction or whatever the case may be.

But I knew that that wasn't what I was going to stay and do, and I saw it as an opportunity to reconfigure. So my father called his old friend, Marian Wright Edelman at the Children's Defense Fund, and they arranged for me to come and work over there, and Marian was so great to let me work there and to try to help their outreach operation. She's a great friend and mentor and someone I owe to this very day.

You know, I think Hillary Clinton may have already been involved, because she and Marian Edelman go back all the way to the very beginning.

INTERVIEWER: [Inaudible.]

KWAME HOLMAN: That's right. That's right. But I never saw Mrs. Clinton there when I was there.

So I was exposed to the world of, like, public relations and press representation, and I found it good and interesting and could see myself doing that, but what I also had learned in the experience of being on the fifth floor in the press office, and working for Florence, was to be around reporters and see reporters and see what they do every day, and realize that that's something I did want to do, that I was interested in doing that, because I didn't have a good sense of what it's like to be a reporter. But when I could see the ageless Bruce Johnson [TV journalist in DC] working there, and Milton Coleman, the reporter for the *Washington Times*, whose name escapes me, a wonderful man. He and I had a great relationship. And I could see, every day something was new and they were coming in and getting involved in something new.

And, again, I knew I was interested in perhaps reporting but I hadn't enough information about what the job was really like. That showed me that it was a job that I could really like to do.

INTERVIEWER: And you went on to a career in radio.

KWAME HOLMAN: Well, yeah, and so I had to decide how I would get into journalism. So I figured, at 28 years old now, I figured I could either be someone's intern, you know, be Bruce's intern at the station, or I could go do what a lot of people were doing then and still do now, which is to go get a graduate degree in journalism and then have that be your entrée. And so I went to Northwestern [University]. I was helped by Jay and Christine Harris. Jay was a major editor out West and just a brilliant African American guy who worked hard to get more African Americans into journalism, and he developed a consortium that put African American students in front of the Columbia Journalism School and the Medill Journalism School at Northwestern, and the Missouri Journalism School, the top schools in the country. And he got me into Medill, essentially.

So I enjoyed the program there. I was in Chicago and learning the skills from some great people, and got out and there wasn't much of a placement opportunity then, but I knew I wanted to kind of work in television, and so I had studied that. There was a Northwestern professor, Rick Brown, who had been a CBS News television producer, and Rick didn't work with me but he liked my voice, which, I tell you, back then, the people who say, "Oh, well, your voice is great on The NewsHour." They wouldn't have thought that then about my voice coming out of school. But Rick got me a job at the CBS affiliate in Savannah, Georgia, and I enjoyed that, chasing fires and car wrecks, and all the local news stuff, and I had a really great time.

But it was 1983 then, and we knew that the Robert MacNeil Report, or the MacNeil/Lehrer Report was going to expand, was going to get some money and expand to an hour on PBS [Public Broadcasting Service], and that Charlene Hunter-Gault was going to be part of that. She had already joined the program by then. And, of course, my old friend, Charlene, and I knew one other person there, Al Vecchione, who I would come to know sort of through Charlene, and Charlene said, "Well, you should apply." And, to this day, all Charlene has told me about how I came to be hired was, "Well, I didn't tell them that they should hire you. I said if you don't hire him, somebody will."

And so I went to New York and talked to Robert MacNeil. I remember Robert MacNeil, Robin—like Marion, he's a very perceptive person, quiet and perceptive. And I'd come to New York and come to his office in Manhattan, and he said at one point, "None of this really impresses you, does it?" And I said, "Well, you know, I don't intend to act as if I'm unimpressed by it, by being here, but maybe it's that when I was coming up, Martin Luther King would be sitting on the couch in the living room, so I guess I don't scare easily," or something like that.

But, again, just a blessing to be in the right place at the right time, and have the right friends. So I spent 30 years at the PBS News Hour, until money got short and a lot of us had to leave just recently.

So now I try to teach journalism, again, having lucked into that by hearing that they needed a journalism instructor downtown at my old school, Medill. I heard about that on the tennis court in Arlington, and a friend of mine, Ian Portnoy, put me into that, so here we are.

INTERVIEWER: So how would you sum up those Marion Barry years, and sort of how he changed you or the city or whatever? Just talk about that for a minute?

KWAME HOLMAN: Gladys, I think the reason we all are involved in this project, and the reason that I was drawn to it and wanted to help do anything I could to help achieve these interviews and get this stuff on the record—well, two reasons. The first is, I guess, maybe not in any particular order but I'll take first the idea that Marion was so completely misunderstood, and his history is misunderstood, and it's not known. That which is known is misunderstood, and the rest, this whole huge persona is not known at all.

INTERVIEWER: Exactly.

KWAME HOLMAN: And so I thought it was hugely important to get out this story of this man who essentially—and we talk to people, as we talk to the Thornell Pages [Barry supporter] and the Dierdre Dalys [Barry staff member] and the Elijah Rogerses after the meeting that Betty King put together, it became clear to me that Marion did even more than I thought he did. I mean, I thought I knew the story, and if you listen to—who's the African American entrepreneur? Mr. [Don] Peebles, a man who I did not know—but I heard him speaking at Marion's service and he stood there and said, "Marion Barry made me," words to that effect. And here he is, a multi-multimillionaire. And just the vision of this man to recognize that all these African American entrepreneurs needed was an opportunity to do what everyone else had been doing as a matter of course in the majority culture, you know, and that it was important to do that.

But there's so much more, and, you know, for example, Thornell and Dierdre were talking and someone said—and maybe it was Ed Meyers [Barry staff member] too—but someone said, "Well, you know, if you think about it, yes, the word among those who know a little something is that Marion Barry built the black middle class in Washington, D.C., the one that wasn't already here. He built a new, broader, black middle class in Washington." And then someone said, and it may have been Dierdre, what that really meant is that he really created the wealth of Prince George's County. He made Prince George's County what it is today, and what it is today is the place with the highest *per capita* income of African Americans perhaps anywhere—of black people, anywhere on the planet.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

KWAME HOLMAN: And so I just think there's so much more to his story. So there's all the things he did and his vision, and then there are all the people whose lives he changed. Since I'm gone from the News Hour I don't have that health insurance anymore. I joined my wife's health insurance, Kaiser Permanente. I'm going there for something routine and I'm talking about

something with the health care technician, and somehow she mentions Marion Barry. She said, "You know, there are only two people you can't say anything bad about to me, and that's Michael Jackson [preeminent African-American singer and song writer] and Marion Barry."

And just as she started to say it, Gladys, I said, "I know where this is going." She said, "I got my first job in his summer jobs program," and while many in the mainstream media—*Washington Post* or whatever—may have, over the years treated that lightly, I think most of us still don't understand and don't have a proper appreciation for what that did for so many young people from low-income families who did not have access to the things. And it sent them on a course, just as turning that corner at 13th and G set me on a course. It's remarkable.

INTERVIEWER: I think this project is important because I firmly believe that Marion Barry's deeds, his vision, all that he accomplished will outlive his indiscretions.

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: And a lot of times that takes time, and this project is going to help because it really captures much of the essence of what he did, and it's kind of stored in one place by the important people that he set on a course, or that he interacted with, and whose lives he touched, and how he changed the city.

KWAME HOLMAN: Absolutely. Absolutely, and with respect to the indiscretions and his difficulty and his imprisonment and—I almost used a word I probably shouldn't use with respect to the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigations] sting. But I always tell people who don't know about Marion and don't know who he was that Marion never took a dime and never hurt anyone other than himself.

INTERVIEWER: Absolutely.

KWAME HOLMAN: And was the kindest, gentlest person you'd ever want to know.

INTERVIEWER: Yes. Well, is there anything else you'd like to say?

KWAME HOLMAN: I think that covers it, Gladys. Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you very much.

KWAME HOLMAN: Thank you.